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# State Humanities Committees (1979-1982): Speech 03

Grethe Peterson

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TESTIMONY OF GRETHE PETERSON  
VICE-PRESIDENT, NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE HUMANITIES COUNCILS  
AND CHAIR, UTAH ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR AND RELATED AGENCIES  
OF THE  
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS, UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

May 7, 1982

I appreciate the opportunity to testify on the Fiscal Year 1983 budget for the National Endowment for the Humanities, particularly with regard to the state humanities councils. I am here because of my work with the Utah Endowment for the Humanities, four years as a council member and two years as Chair, and as the current Vice-President of the National Federation of State Humanities Councils. But perhaps even more important, I am here because of my commitment to the humanities. Through my experiences as a student and as a volunteer in the private sector, I have come to understand that the humanities are more than bodies of knowledge which link the present with the past and the future. The humanities provide us with a way of looking at and responding to the world we live in. The humanities can help us place ourselves in a cultural, historical, and philosophical context, enabling us to make better decisions for ourselves and for our society.

State humanities councils were established in 1971, in the words of law which created NEH, "to furnish adequate programs in the humanities in each of the several states." While there may be debate as to what constitutes "adequate," there can be no doubt that state councils are doing what they are supposed to do. A brief description of representative projects may reveal more clearly how one typical council, the Utah Endowment for the Humanities, accomplishes its goals.

In one of our more unconventional efforts, for instance, an anthropologist has been assisting the Ute Indian Tribe strengthen its language. The circumstances of this project are exceptional. The Utes believe their language has secret powers and are thus very protective about using it. Probably for this reason, Ute has not become a written language. Without documents, with nothing to preserve and read, Ute is entirely dependent on oral traditions. These traditions are weakening as time goes on. Somewhat curiously, for instance, families, rather than generations, are keeping the oral tradition of Ute alive, and fewer and fewer families are doing so as time passes. The project anthropologist, who has won the trust of the Utes and learned to speak the language, is now working with the families that still use the language, teaching them to become teachers of other families. If this "cadre" idea succeeds, and it seems to be, the language will take on new roots in Ute society, even as the people continue to participate in contemporary society.

This project is enabling a culture to maintain its traditions through its connections with the past. It is helping a people sustain their identity and place in the development of the American West. Without such distinctive and

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creative peoples, the culture of the West loses its powers to energize and inspire. Our efforts with the Ute tribes have enlarged the state's appreciation of another culture and its contribution to our past.

Let me mention another project, this one designed to reach the rural population of Utah. A Humanist-in-Residence program has enabled us to bring together some of the finest humanities scholars in the state with people living in small isolated communities. The scholar works with the sponsoring organization (school, city government, museum, hospital, prison) on a program or format that enables him to provide an experience in the humanities for the community. One of our residencies was spent in several communities in a large southeastern county, whose people make their living in ranching, farming, and mining, and where there is a large Ute and Navajo population. The humanist, a professor of English on sabbatical, found that film programs, especially films based on books and plays, were effective ways to draw people from different backgrounds together for discussions of content, style, and message typical of the humanities. The film series was enormously successful because of the number of people attending -- and the issues that it raised.

We have found, as have other state councils, that the mini-grant (grants up to \$1,000) often have a pronounced "multiplier" effect in terms of the ratio of quality per dollar. It was used to support an apparently conventional humanities-and-public-policy project, "The Energy Crisis and the Humanities" at the Weber County Library. I say "apparently conventional" because, though its format was a fairly standard lecture series, it used scholars who skillfully presented material and generated significant discussion. The presentations were sound and, in each case, specifically linked to the philosophical concerns about man and his environment. The series dealt with the Western religious and scientific views of man and his environment, the ethical and political issues of limited resources, and finally considering alternatives for the future. One speaker insured a kind of "gathering effect" by acting as moderator and questioner of the preceding speakers, an ethicist, a political scientist, a family studies specialist, and a chemist. One of our more simple and inexpensive projects was one of our best because of context and presentation; it was substantial, informative, and stimulating.

It might be useful for you to know something about the operation of state councils. Our work falls basically into two categories: grant-making and policy-making. Councils meet three or four times each year to discuss applications for project support, as well as reports and recommendations from staff and subcommittees regarding policy questions. Such questions could include changes in guidelines (e.g., shall the council reserve a certain amount of its funds for programs in oral history? in public issues? etc.); how to raise more non-federal funds (either through intensive efforts by council members or by helping project directors raise money in their communities); whether to identify a particular area of interest (e.g., the humanities in the health professions) and distribute a "Request for Proposals" throughout the state; and how to improve the level of participation by academic humanists from the state's institutions of higher education. Other policy matters could be listed here, but these are enough to show that the councils are not merely passive application-receiving bodies. They have responded to the challenges implicit in the 1976 and 1980 authorizing legislation and to encouragement from NEH by seeking recognition in their states as important, autonomous, effective institutions for cultural and educational affairs.

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Members of state humanities councils are not unique among American volunteers, but they do display the unusual dedication, initiative, and energy which characterizes volunteer work at its best. They define their council responsibilities expansively, they take their mandate seriously, and strive to involve as many citizens in as many settings as possible. Their contributions exemplify the kind of public philosophy envisioned in the originating legislation.

The councils now look to an uncertain future. They have, characteristically, treated the threat to their program budgets as an intellectual challenge and organizational problem. They have set about systematically appraising their programs, reassessing their activities, and realigning their priorities. They undertook these tasks collectively and individually: collectively, through the National Federation of State Humanities Councils, whose Study Group on Alternatives for the State Councils disseminated a widely used report summarizing council plans and responses; and, individually, in adapting the generalized suggestions to their local circumstances.

A multitude of ways to save money and increase funds for their programs have been considered. These include strengthening the councils' capacity to raise non-federal funds, which was the subject of a workshop arranged by the Federation at the 1981 National Meeting of State Humanities Councils. The councils are becoming increasingly sophisticated and adept at enlisting the support of corporations, individuals, and foundations for their programs, as the table below shows. What we see is a steady and reliable growth in the gift-getting capacity of the councils, underlining the importance of the gift and matching authority.

### Funding History of State Humanities Councils

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Number of State Councils</u>	<u>NEH Obligations</u>	<u>Gifts Received by NEH for State Councils</u>
1971	6	\$ 587,000	\$ -0-
1972	17	2,216,000	-0-
1973	32	5,160,000	14,000
1974	41	7,568,000	67,000
1975	50	13,529,000	80,000
1976	50	18,092,000	450,500
1977	51	18,978,000	738,730
1978	51	18,500,000	1,407,647
1979	52	20,678,500	1,898,408
1980	52	21,081,074	2,317,000
1981	52	23,947,000	2,845,000

The councils have also given considerable thought to cutting back on council meetings, publications, staff travel, and staff size. But we have found there is a point at which the attempt to save money by reducing administrative expenditures becomes counterproductive. A certain minimal structure must be main-

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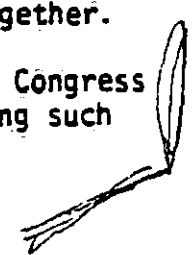
tained if the councils are to remain at all effective. Most are at that level now: two to six persons, depending on the size of the state, have been found to be needed to manage grants, coordinate council activities, evaluate projects, and stay informed of the interests and needs of the people and institutions of their states.

Thus, the councils join with other proponents of the humanities in asking that funds for NEH not be reduced in Fiscal Year 1983. Funds for the Division of State Programs in recent years have been fairly stable at about 22.48% of NEH's program funds. This has resulted in the FY 1980 grant levels to the state councils shown in Appendix A. The Division has reported that it intends to maintain total funding for the councils in an amount equal to or a little greater than their FY 1980 levels through October, 1983, if funding continues at its current level.

If total funding should fall, the councils' grant-making potential would be severely impaired. In fact, in such a case, they might not be able to support enough projects to attract the non-federal gifts needed to release NEH matching funds to any significant degree. This is a good reason to retain the outright funding for the state councils at their present level.

The councils, to be sure, are dependent on federal funds. The nature of this "dependency" must, however, be qualified. First, the councils' dependency is perhaps unavoidable, not only because of the financial circumstances of many state governments (only one of which, that of Puerto Rico, has made any serious effort to incorporate its humanities council into the government) but because of the kind of civic educational experiment that the state councils represent. They would probably not survive if left to the give and take of the economic marketplace or the preferences of administrators in higher education. It can survive as a federal program, but this should not be construed as a liability. In supporting some experimental, non-traditional forms of education, the federal government is demonstrating its legitimate capacity for effective leadership. Second, every council succeeds in matching its entire federal grant with services and goods, i.e., "in-kind" contributions, and with cash gifts. This is, of course, required by the law. But not only is every federal dollar matched, it is over-matched: the total value of in-kind and cash contributed to the programs they sponsor invariably exceeds the outright grants. And third, the councils' grantees are not dependent on federal funds or on the awards by the councils. They are not temporary organizations which depend on the councils for their main support; they are permanent educational, civic, religious, and ad hoc groups which collaborate with the councils in pursuit of common ideals and interests. State councils represent effective grass roots efforts that bind communities together.

By assuring the continuity and strength of the state humanities councils, Congress will be contributing to the maintenance of the productive partnership among such groups, the councils, NEH, the Congress itself, and American communities.



Appendix A

## NEH GRANTS TO STATE HUMANITIES COUNCILS 1980

State	1980 Authorized Outright	Authorized G&P	Total
AL	5373,000	\$ 15,000	5388,000
AK	396,000	300,000	696,000
AZ	344,000	30,000	374,000
AR	358,000	80,000	438,000
CA	620,136	450,000	1,270,136
CO	375,042	100,000	475,042
CT	378,000	150,000	528,000
DE	309,000	60,000	369,000
FL	502,000	50,000	552,000
GA	390,660	8,000	398,660
HJ	378,000	110,000	488,000
ID	328,000	85,000	413,000
IL	562,000	250,000	812,000
IN	430,000	230,000	660,000
IA	342,000	50,000	392,000
KA	362,000	45,000	407,000
KY	387,000	30,000	417,000
LA	398,000	200,000	598,000
ME	323,000	20,000	343,000
MD	402,000	200,000	602,000
MA	429,000	20,000	449,000
MI	516,000	125,000	641,000
MS	399,000	100,000	499,000
NE	363,000	30,000	393,000
NC	418,000	30,000	448,000
ND	333,662	20,000	353,662
NE	344,000	60,000	404,000
NY	323,000	50,000	373,000
NH	332,640	10,000	342,640
NJ	474,000	175,000	649,000
NM	236,000	25,000	261,000
NY	709,000	250,000	959,000
NC	434,000	80,000	514,000
ND	323,000	200,000	523,000
OH	551,000	200,000	751,000
OK	374,000	180,000	554,000
OR	371,663	80,000	451,663
PA	581,151	150,000	731,151
PR	381,000	20,000	401,000
RI	330,000	75,000	405,000
SC	374,000	70,000	444,000
SD	324,000	150,000	474,000
TN	407,000	100,000	507,000
TX	620,000	300,000	920,000
UT	313,000	40,000	353,000
VT	320,000	50,000	370,000
VA	425,000	120,000	545,000
WV	425,000	250,000	675,000
Wash. D.C.	324,000	10,000	334,000
WY	357,403	50,000	407,403
WI	414,000	30,000	444,000
WY	318,000	20,000	338,000